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FEATURED TOPIC

Socioeconomic class has dramatic effects on opportunity within and beyond college—yet it is a challenging topic of conversation for students and faculty alike. This issue of *Diversity & Democracy* provides some tools to guide difficult discussions about class in the hopes of creating more inclusive campuses and a more equitable world beyond.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- 04 | Don't Lose Your Working-Class Students
- 07 | Raising Awareness of Class Privilege Among Students
- 10 | Stratified Learning: Responding to the Class System of Higher Education
- 12 | Race and Class: Taking Action at the Intersections

Class on Campus: Breaking the Silence Surrounding Socioeconomics

■ **SUSAN E. BORREGO**, vice president for planning and enrollment management at California State University-Dominguez Hills

As bell hooks has said, “Nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class difference than in educational settings” (2000). On college and university campuses, everyday practices and policies are embedded with unexamined class assumptions, and individuals experience classed norms in powerful ways. Yet there is little consciousness about how class affects campus climates and individual lives. In order to improve our educational settings, we must identify the class-based norms embedded in how we conduct business, how we organize curricula, what we teach, and how we shape all these questions. By recognizing our biases, we will create more inclusive learning environments governed by more complex understandings of diversity.

Unexamined and Invisible

In the United States, there is little discussion about social class. The deeply held but inaccurate notion that America is a “classless society” stifles many conversations about the impact of class in our lives. Furthermore, the recognition that class is an issue challenges the core American belief that people can “pick themselves up by their bootstraps.” American history includes some true “rags to riches” stories. But these obscure how class background typically shapes opportunity in a culture where the single most reliable predictor of one’s class status is the class status of one’s father (Bee 1987).

Admittedly, class in America is a complex topic. Multiple definitions of class, disagreement about the significance of class background, and ambiguity about class categories all complicate our attempts to understand the subject. For many years sociologists have studied economic stratification but have made few attempts to examine how class shapes life experiences. But, as Julio Alves has said, even if “the definition of class evades us...the consequences certainly don’t” (2006).

To understand these consequences, we must first understand how class shapes individual lives, social policy, and educational opportunity. In order to create a more diverse and inclusive educational community and to use a class lens as a resource, we must acknowledge the complexities that surround identity.

Multiple Identities

Janet Zandy describes class as “an aspect of shared economic circumstances and shared social and cultural practices in relationship to positions of power... [Class] shapes our lives and intersects with race, ethnicity, gender and geography in profound ways” (1996). In order to build inclusive environments, we must understand how these multiple identities can also intersect to “form an interlocking system of oppression” (Linkon 1999). In other words, we must understand our own relationships to power.

In reality, individual lives involve multiple and dynamic overlapping identities. While working-class people, for example, may share common experiences related to

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

On an abstract level, the United States is a country fixated on socioeconomic status. Americans routinely note the growing divide between rich and poor while immersed in a wealth-obsessed culture that those who talk of “the American Dream” frame as widely accessible. Yet on an interpersonal level, Americans are quiet about class, a still-taboo topic in polite conversation. This silence extends to the halls of higher education, where belief in meritocracy and discomfort with one’s status can quickly shut down discourse.

The history of class-based critique in education is rich and complex. But as economic pressures and political maneuvering deepen socioeconomic divides, it is more important than ever that we all join the conversation. Socioeconomic status influences where students are likely to attend college and how they fare when they arrive. Student success depends not just on programs and policies, but also on campus climates—and new innovations in liberal education cut across all these domains. By opening the door to conversation, this issue of *Diversity & Democracy* suggests methods to create more inclusive campus cultures, while providing students with a lens that enhances their ability to effect change, both in college and beyond.

economic or social vulnerability, their experiences differ based on other aspects of identity. Working-class people of color often experience different forms of marginalization related to racial identity. The same is true of gender and class, sexual orientation and class, geography and class, etc. There is no single class identity: class is always experienced through multiple lenses.

Even if we recognize these intersections, we often aren’t very skillful at describing them. Consequently, our conversations can dissolve into competitions over who is most marginalized, distracting from powerful opportunities to build bridges across difference. By developing class consciousness that attends to multiple identities, we increase our ability to provide effective leadership, create diverse environments, and expand the foundations of knowledge. We thus open the door to more integrated learning experiences for all students.

Class in the Academy

The practice of exploring class in the classroom has powerful implications for all students. Helping students understand their own relationships to power is

an important first step toward engaging diverse communities. This understanding is important both for working-class students, who often feel that they do not fit into the academic environment, and for students of relative class privilege, who often are unconscious of how certain advantages shape their lives.

Like work related to white privilege, discussions of class privilege can be emotional for students and faculty. Embedded assumptions about class and merit, including what is “lazy” or “productive” and who qualifies as “poor,” can quickly create tension in a discussion. A stigma attaches to identifying oneself as working class, with students often feeling shame about admitting that their experiences are different from their classmates’ (one student described not wanting her classmates to know that her mother worked as a custodian at their school). At the same time, middle- and upper-middle-class students may find it easier to deny their privilege than to admit the ways class status has benefitted them.

Further complicating these explorations is the fact that education has long functioned as a way out of the economic restrictions associated with being working

class. The culture of higher education, however, sends both subtle and explicit messages to working-class students, encouraging them to leave their communities (and even their identities) behind in order to be successful in the academy. Laura Rendón (1996) has described the space working-class students occupy, located between working-class (home) culture and middle/upper-class (university) culture, as “border living.” In order for students to have holistic and welcoming learning experiences, educators must identify strategies to assist students in negotiating “border living.”

Rethinking Middle-Class Norms

If education is a “way out” of working-class culture, this is not unrelated to the fact that institutional practices are embedded within middle-class norms. If we are committed to creating more inclusive learning communities, we must critically examine our institutions and our practices to unmask how classism manifests in organizational structures, whether through the texts we use, how our classes are organized, or how we reflect on our social locations.

Scholarly disciplines have broadened the base of knowledge by illuminating what and who has been missing from canons, historical analyses, and scientific questions. For example, the practice of excluding women or people of color as subjects of study or voices of authority at one time went unexamined. Scholarship about race and gender has now revitalized disciplines. Similarly, we need to unmask narrow constructions of class that diminish scholarship and limit learning experiences.

When choosing textbooks, for instance, do we include material that helps students develop capacities to examine the complexities of class? Do we offer multiple class perspectives so working-class students can see themselves as much as middle-class students can? A sociology professor who taught

social stratification for twenty years realized that her own middle-class training led her to teach theoretical constructs without considering the lived implications of class for her students. She redesigned the course, expanded examples, and incorporated experiential knowledge. Exploring the lived reality of class became a common investigation for her students, generating rich conversations, revealing complex differences, and producing deeper understandings of the course material. She transformed the learning experience by breaking the unspoken norms that had excluded the knowledge and experiences of some students.


Recommitting to Inclusive Institutions

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has argued that we must “educate for a just and equitable future” (Schneider 2007). Fulfilling this commitment undoubtedly involves cultivating a deeper understanding of how social class shapes lives and institutions. By examining our practices through a class-based lens, we can develop more complex understandings of diversity and more integrated, inclusive learning experiences for our students.

A commitment to educating the whole student requires knowing who students are, what challenges they face, and what experiences they bring to college. Educators must develop cultural competency skills to effectively facilitate across difference. Institutions, too, must develop policies and programs that support warmer climates for working-class students, including orientation and transition programs that help working-class students learn the unwritten rules of college. And students, regardless of their class identity, must develop knowledge and cultural competence that includes an understanding of class.

As we make these changes in our institutions, we must recognize that

class perspectives, like those related to race and gender, offer a critical lens for our work. Though a great deal of work related to race and gender remains, we have made some progress related to these issues thanks in large part to perspectives provided by new ways of seeing and new disciplines. Forty years ago, formal women’s studies programs did not exist. Today the discipline has shaped pedagogical approaches, institutional practices, and even what counts as knowledge. Imagine what might be possible if working-class studies did the same.

By inviting class culture to influence our practice and pedagogy—and by opening up the discussion about class on campus, as this issue of *Diversity & Democracy* attempts to do—we can assist students in tapping their unique class positions as a source of power and prepare them to become class-conscious leaders in the world at large. In doing so, we answer Laura Rendón’s call “to create a new consciousness in the academic borderlands—one that heals, one that connects diverse cultures, languages, realities, and ways of knowing” (1996). 

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[CLASS ON CAMPUS]

Don't Lose Your Working-Class Students

■ ELIZABETH GRASSI, JOAN ARMON, and HEIDI BULMAHN BARKER, all assistant professors in the department of education at Regis University

In the halls of the teacher education department at our small liberal arts university, the three of us often talk about the same issues concerning students in our program who worry us. The issues seem to grow out of a common characteristic some struggling students share: a working-class background. Two of the three of us are from working-class families, and

Wesley's Story

Wesley enrolled in our university on a sports scholarship. He attended several other institutions beforehand and was the first in his family to go to college. Wesley remembered times in his childhood when his family did not have enough money for necessities, especially during periods when his father was unemployed. When he enrolled in his

that could promote their success in the United States. Her concern for their welfare led her to create a partnership with Wesley. Ms. Nemise taught Wesley about linguistic and cultural expectations for children coming from Mexico, and Wesley explained to the class the cultural and linguistic components of academic success in the United States. Ms. Nemise called on Wesley to teach the students regularly even though he was a student in an educational methods course rather than a student teacher.

Wesley was forced to broaden his cultural knowledge in order to teach effectively. For example, when Ms. Nemise asked Wesley to teach the class mathematical concepts, he quickly discovered that the traditional approach he had used in other placements did not work well in this classroom. He turned to Ms. Nemise and the students to find out how mathematical concepts are approached in their country of origin. Once he understood the perspective of the students, he was able to use their background knowledge as a launching pad for lessons and successfully complete the math curriculum.

When school personnel discovered that Wesley was a basketball player, they asked him to start an after-school program. He developed a basketball club with children of all ages. When he noticed some mothers standing out in the hallway waiting, he invited them in and expanded the club to include parents as well.

This placement was a turning point for Wesley. He started coming to class regularly, completing assignments, and actively contributing to class discussions. His professors highlighted Wesley's experience in the classroom, and gave him the space to tell his classmates not only about the successful lessons or programs he conducted in his school placements, but also about his background and its contribution to his successful teaching practices.

For working-class students, the ability to draw connections between their lives, courses of study, and future jobs is essential.

financing college was a problem for all three of us, so we understand the challenges facing working-class students.

After much reading and consultation, we identified some strategies that we'd like to share. Since developing them, we've deliberately tried to apply the strategies in our classes and our department. We want to show solidarity with our students from working-class homes who may feel isolated among peers from middle- and upper-middle-class families. Working-class students need to know that their perspectives are valued in courses throughout the curriculum, and we are finding that our students benefit from the consistent and predictable approaches we have introduced in our courses in English as a second language, literacy, and special education. To illustrate what we're doing, we present a case study of the progress of one working-class student in our department, Wesley (a pseudonym).

first upper-level education class in our department, he had a very low grade point average and a reputation for not taking classes or coursework seriously. From the start, Wesley resisted course requirements that were not immediately relevant or important to him. He needed help connecting the material discussed in class with his work in his teaching internships.

Wesley was placed at Oakton Elementary School in Ms. Nemise's class. Most of the school's students were from low-income families. Many of them were second language learners, and the teacher was from Mexico. This context presented challenges for Wesley, because the school was underfunded and Ms. Nemise (a pseudonym), although fluent in Spanish and Mexican culture, was not fluent in academic English. Ms. Nemise desperately wanted the children in the class to have access to the cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills

Wesley also started visiting our offices regularly, spending time talking about his placements and how much he enjoyed working with children. He was pleased about the positive impact he was having on them and their families. We exchanged our stories with Wesley, discovering that we shared common elements in our histories. In short, Wesley became an engaged, motivated education student and received job offers in every placement thereafter.

Connections

One component of Wesley's success was his perception that his elementary school placement was relevant to his college coursework. Other working-class students in our program also talk to us periodically about their perceived need for their courses to have real-world application. Richard A. Greenwald and Elizabeth Grant write in "Border Crossings," published in the 1999 book *Teaching Working Class*, about the importance of engaging working-class students in meaningful activities that offer them concrete outcomes. Placing Wesley in a low-income school with "at risk" children prompted him to use instructional strategies from his coursework to communicate effectively with non-English-speaking students. He saw the results of his actions immediately, which motivated him to become a better teacher. Wesley consulted his professors about how to make lessons more comprehensible to non-English-speaking students, asking the Spanish speakers among them for translations of English phrases so that children could better understand him.

For working-class students, the ability to draw connections between their lives, courses of study, and future jobs is essential. Wesley's school placement, in conjunction with course discussions, readings, and presentations, helped him to see the connections between his background and his

chosen profession. Education researchers stress that working-class students should be allowed to make connections in class between their observations and personal histories and classroom material.

Drawing on students' experiences in class discussions is an effective way to tackle issues of social class. When Wesley began working with children from economic backgrounds that mirrored his own, he reflected on his memories from childhood of living with scarce resources to help him to understand the children's situation. Doing so enabled him to make deep connections with the children and their parents as well as his own past. In Oakton classrooms, Wesley was able to build on his strong belief in the educational system as a tool for moving up the economic ladder. The connections he made between his experience and that of his students surfaced not only in the energy and commitment Wesley brought to the school, but also in the rapport he built with families. Mothers regularly brought him gifts of food before school. When we visited him at Oakton, every child in the school seemed to know him.

A Matter of Trust

Trust between working-class students and their professors and teachers in school placements appears to be essential to the students' success. We find that working-class students, even more so than students from other class backgrounds, respond well to being trusted with responsibility. Many have taken on significant responsibilities in the home earlier than their middle- or upper-class peers.



Bates College

Wesley developed trust in educational institutions as he immersed himself in his school placement, which provided opportunities for him to demonstrate his strengths. He was desperately needed by the school, the teacher, the children, and their families. His strengths—compassion for children in need and a passion for working with children from low-income homes—were highly valued at Oakton. When Ms. Nemise relied on Wesley to teach lessons and other school personnel asked him to organize after-school activities, Wesley took these responsibilities seriously and asked us, his professors, to help him translate and create lessons. When he visited our offices, we worked with him to make further connections between his coursework, his upbringing, and his practical experience.

Some research has found that working-class students have a sink-or-swim philosophy and maintain an emotional toughness that prevents them from reaching out to faculty when they are failing or need help (see the article by Janet Galligani Casey in the July–August 2005 issue of *Academe*). By placing Wesley in a situation that allowed him to make his strengths apparent, we opened the door to his having conversations with professors—conversations based on

his successes rather than his failures. To include working-class students in higher education, we have to first make them comfortable. We did so with Wesley by sharing our own stories with him and encouraging him to share his stories from a platform of strength. We built trust, and over the course of two years, he opened up about his academic difficulties. We responded by working with him at a departmental level to address gaps in his writing and other academic skills and pointed him toward financial resources and emotional support to help him graduate and complete his teacher licensure.

Although Wesley is highly marketable in any school district, he chose to work at one of the poorest schools in the area. His positive impact on the students, school, and community continues. We now know, after working with Wesley and others like him, that we can take positive action to support our students through the college and teacher licensure experience. Although not all working-class students aspire to teach children in low-income schools, we now intervene much more directly to encourage the sometimes latent talents of our working-class students and the passionate commitment many of them have to children in low-income areas. We coach them on how to handle college and point out its relevancy to the practical world. We explicitly make connections between coursework and practice in a way that coincides with the students' working-class histories and their desire to help others improve their lives through education. We build trust by carefully selecting school placements where our students will be entrusted with significant responsibilities that highlight their strengths and create safe spaces for them to reveal and confront challenges, whether personal or academic.

Several of the working-class students in our department are dealing with financial burdens, domestic conflicts, caretaking responsibilities, or the inability to attend class and complete assignments consistently. We meet regularly as a department to brainstorm about how best to work with each student. Drawing from our list of strategies, we tailor our responses to the particular student. Our approaches typically involve mentoring students in academic or other skills (such as interviewing), checking in with them regularly about their overall well-being, or visiting them in school placements to let them know that we have a personal investment in their success.


The challenge for us, of course, is finding the time for such extra efforts. And sometimes we fail, even after we've tried strategies such as creating an individual goal-setting plan with a student. If we find that a student is not capable of or committed to becoming a teacher who can make a positive difference for children, we work with our campus career services department to counsel the student out of teacher education and into another field.

Our first goal in spending extra time and effort to support our working-class students is, however, to prevent them from dropping out of teacher education. Our task is collaborative: the students must adapt to the requirements of our college and our state's teacher-licensure program, and we must adapt the program to our students and their distinctive needs and talents. We see the potential of diamonds in the rough, and if we make initial efforts to get to know working-class students and support them, and if the students respond, we can usually guide them to success. A good number of them have in fact graduated from the program and are employed in local

school districts where their mentors in the field speak highly of them.

Our next goal is to collect longitudinal data on teacher and student performance and teacher retention so that we can answer more questions about our students and our strategies, such as:

- Did we help our working-class students find their calling in life? If so, what strategies helped us accomplish this?
- Do we approach male students differently from female students and, if so, how?
- What more might we learn about what students' working-class backgrounds bring to their teaching experiences?
- Does a working-class background help students become more successful than more privileged students in the field? If so, in what contexts?

As more students from low-income homes attend school, teachers from low-income, working-class backgrounds are needed more than ever to understand, nurture, and teach students what they need to do to reach their own potential. Human talent is precious, and we cannot afford to ignore the passion, expertise, and energy of our Wesleys—qualities that many children in our nation's schools are waiting for and deserve. 

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[CLASS ON CAMPUS]

Raising Awareness of Class Privilege Among Students

■ RORY GILBERT, manager of Diversity Initiatives for Maricopa County Community College District

Class privilege is “the elephant in the room” when it comes to diversity education. Students who willingly wrestle with race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion often balk at exploring class privilege, which threatens the fundamental myth that all people in the United States enjoy equal access to opportunity. Yet unexplored beliefs about class impact the policies, practices, and relationships that shape our lives. Our students, the next generation of workers, community leaders, and global citizens, must recognize class privilege to break down systemic barriers to opportunity. How can educators successfully teach students about class identity?

Preparing to Introduce High-Level Concepts

Privilege and class are high-level concepts for students and teachers striving to discuss diversity in the classroom, and preparatory work is critical. As educators work to create an environment where students can safely explore challenging concepts, some fundamental rules apply:

1. Students need to feel validated and respected. Guilt and blame are not effective tools in moving people forward in social justice work: they simply increase resistance.

2. Students learn through their own processes of discovery. They need to experience principles in action, and they need to identify for themselves what changes are necessary in order to feel invested in change. Thus diversity education is developmental work: educators must meet people “where they are,” leading them on their own journeys of discovery by building their capacity for change.

3. People need to feel connected to the subject at hand. Diversity work is ultimately about relationships, which is why experiential and synergistic learning is so important.

Privilege and class are high-level concepts for students and teachers striving to discuss diversity in the classroom, and preparatory work is critical.

These fundamental rules provide the framework for a number of capacity-building guidelines. First, the instructor needs to *help learners create a community that is safe and inclusive*. Working as a community to develop standards of behavior can help. For example, the instructor should be cognizant of the balance of voices in the classroom based on privilege status and (without expressing judgment) invite the class to find solutions to disparities in who speaks up.

Second, the instructor should *help students understand that “diversity”*

is complex, includes everyone, and is not a code word for “some people.”

Students should recognize that they have many interrelated identities and identify their connections with others. Unmasking dominant group invisibility is important: when discussing race, for instance, encourage white students to recognize that they have a race.

Third, the instructor should *help students develop skills in intergroup communication*, including empathy, perspective taking, and comfort with

ambiguity. The instructor should provide opportunities to practice intergroup communication, make the process of intergroup dialogue overt by naming it, and help students process their experiences so they feel validated for their efforts.

Finally, instructors need to *ensure that students understand key concepts* including socialization, social construction, hierarchy, and systemic oppression (see Adams 2000 or Johnson 2001 for background information). Without these frameworks,



University of Montana

students may personalize the concepts of privilege and class rather than understanding their systemic nature.

Example: Using Handedness to Introduce Privilege

Discussion of handedness (adapted from presentations by Steve Robbins) is one way to introduce the concept of privilege and minimize resistance before engaging in more specific discussions about class. Handedness does not carry the emotional charge attached to other differences in today's society. Although left handedness is no longer associated with deviance, many people have learned to use their nondominant right hands to adapt. Left-handed people face numerous daily obstacles, including the risk of accidents caused by operating instruments designed for right-handed users. Yet right-handed people are often unaware of the privileges they enjoy.

Handedness demonstrates many concepts related to privilege:

- a) Handedness is not chosen or bestowed.
- b) Right handedness is considered normal, while left handedness has historically been perceived as deviant, dangerous, and sinister.
- c) The society may view left-handed people as awkward or strange, and left-handed people often believe this about themselves (internalized oppression).
- d) Left-handed people frequently change their behaviors to fit into a right-handed world (passing and code shifting).
- e) Right-handed people are unconscious of the benefits they receive (the privilege of ignorance).
- f) Right-handed people cannot avoid the benefits they receive, even when they are conscious of the benefits (institutionalized and systemic nature of privilege).

Students accept handedness privilege and recognize that they are not personally responsible for the oppression of left-handed people. They understand

that they have inherited a system that benefits some and disadvantages others. Once students have accepted handedness, they are more open to learning about other privileged identities. I have found that many people who experience nonprivileged status in other parts of their lives appreciate this analogy.

The Challenge of Teaching about Social Class

Social class is a taboo subject in the United States. I have found that students prefer to stratify the middle class into a range of subclasses (lower-lower middle, lower middle, middle middle, upper middle, and upper-upper middle) rather than identify themselves or others in their peer group as either lower or upper class. This behavior is not specific to students, nor is it specific to those of a certain socioeconomic status: people with annual incomes from \$20,000 to more than \$100,000 tend to define themselves as "middle class" (Vigeland 2008; NOW: Politics and Economy 2004).

This reluctance may originate in the pervasive myths about opportunity in the United States. As Greg Mantsios (2003) has noted, Americans commonly believe that "success in the United States requires no more than hard work, sacrifice, and perseverance," that "everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed," that "most Americans have achieved...affluence," and that "the United States is fundamentally a classless society." Challenges to these deep-seated beliefs cause cognitive dissonance, a "discrepancy between what we currently believe to be true and other contradictory information" (Goodman 2001).

Cognitive dissonance can be particularly potent for students of class privilege. They are often unconscious of their privileged status, believe that their success is based on their own merits, and think that the benefits they receive are normal and available to all. What does it mean to a person of class privilege to acknowledge

that health care, legal protection, and education services are disparately rendered? How is one's status challenged if success depends on privilege rather than on hard work? (Mantsios 2003) These questions can make students exceedingly uncomfortable and invoke anxiety, fear, confusion, anger, guilt, and resentment. People of privilege may find it easier to deny that privilege exists than to experience this discomfort (Goodman 2001).

Although students of privilege are often unconscious of the benefits associated with status, students without privilege have to confront their difference on a routine basis. Yet even these students subscribe to the general tendency "not to talk about [class] and [to] think of [America] as a 'classless' society" (Collins and Yeskel 2005). Many students who do not have class privilege subscribe to the notion that their class position is of their own making. These students react to conversations about class in a variety of ways, from caretaking privileged students who feel guilty, showing pride in their own accomplishments, expressing anger, embarrassment, or fear of being judged, or shock at discovering their social class.

This range of reactions presents a great challenge to instructors working to keep both privileged and nonprivileged students from fleeing the discomfort of the subject. But after the instructor has laid the groundwork for general discussions of class, an exploration of class privilege can be effective.

Example Exercise: Understanding Social Class Hierarchy

An introductory activity masked as a warm-up exercise allows students to appreciate how quickly socialization to the class hierarchy occurs:

- Give each student a token or strip of paper of one of three random colors (e.g. orange, green, and blue) not connected to their identities. Ask them to talk to as many of their classmates

as possible, exchanging papers each time they talk to another student.

- Interrupt the activity after a minute or two and explain that you have forgotten to tell them something: Blue is best, green is “okay,” and orange is not so good. Remind them about the purpose of the activity—to talk to as many students as possible—and ask them to proceed. Note the differences in behavior now that you have assigned value to the strips (engaged in social construction of difference).
- Interrupt a third time and call the blue group over to you. In front of the other groups, talk about how lucky they are to be blue. Do not attach any real meaning to their good fortune (don’t associate it with wealth, intelligence, ability, etc.). Then call the green group over and tell them that they are “okay.” Finally, call the orange group over and tell them how sorry you are for their misfortune. Ask the students to continue the activity, reminding them to talk to as many students as possible. Once again, observe the behaviors.
- After another two minutes, end the activity and debrief by asking students to describe what happened, identify their feelings, discuss the changes in behavior, and relate the exercise to real-life experiences. Students are usually quick to recognize the parallels to class structure. Instructors can use this activity to discuss how class privilege is initially an accident of birth, but ultimately something that we work to maintain.

Conclusion

This article has provided some introductory resources and context for developing lesson plans on a complex topic. I believe that students who are aware of socioeconomic privilege are more able to make decisions and implement practices that benefit all members of society. If they are able to recognize and address classism, students can

change the conversation about class. By providing adequate contextualization and preparation and including the voices of both privileged and non-privileged students, instructors can facilitate students’ movement to action. When we aid students in creating strong learning communities, we help them navigate their own journeys of discovery. □

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Resources for Teaching about Class and Classism

- *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne (2005) provides insights on class as culture and includes useful surveys to help students understand class differences.
- *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, edited by Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin (1997), includes a curriculum chapter on classism with useful activities to illustrate the extremes of wealth and poverty in the United States.
- “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (1988) prepares students to explore their own points of privilege.
- “Star Power,” a challenging activity sold by Simulations Training Systems, helps demonstrate how privilege and class are interconnected, but may result in resistance even with significant preparation. www.stsintl.com/schools-charities/star_power.html
- “Examining Class and Race,” an activity by Paul Kivel, addresses the myth of the level playing field through a sociogram-like representation of class participants. The activity may be adapted to include a range of target identities (gender, sexual orientation, ability status, etc.) (paulkivel.com/resources/classandrace.pdf).
- *People Like Us*, a PBS video, examines through interviews and commentary the role social class plays in the United States. A supplemental Web site provides games, statistics, and instructional guides: www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/
- Jane Elliott’s Blue-eyed/Brown-eyed films, available at www.janeelliott.com, explore how easily people are socialized and impacted by hierarchical systems.

—Rory Gilbert

[CLASS ON CAMPUS]

Stratified Learning: Responding to the Class System of Higher Education

■ **SHERRY LEE LINKON**, professor of English and American Studies and codirector of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University

A recent *New Yorker* cartoon shows a middle-aged man in a business suit flapping his arms and hovering several feet in the air, while a similarly dressed colleague looks on and comments, “Interesting, but we can never forget that you went to a state college.” Perhaps because I teach at a state college, that cartoon made me laugh even as it made me angry. I got angry, too, when my parents brushed aside my suggestion that my saxophone-virtuoso nephew apply

Those differences affect the experiences and opportunities of students as well as faculty. But before we can consider how to respond to this class hierarchy, we need to understand how it operates.

Why Status Matters

Like working-class people, working-class institutions are at once invisible and denigrated. Because they don’t fit the standard image of college, working-class institutions—along with both faculty

Higher education in America is stratified in ways that reflect and perpetuate the social hierarchies of American society.

to Youngstown State University (YSU) because we have a great jazz program and he could have received a full scholarship. He went to Northwestern instead. Although I come from an upper-middle-class background, after studying class in education for more than a decade, I have a working-class chip on my shoulder.

Higher education in America is stratified in ways that reflect and perpetuate the social hierarchies of American society. This isn’t just a matter of status; it’s a matter of material conditions. Funding and connections buy elite schools (most private four-year and research institutions, and some highly selective and well-funded public universities) the resources (and time) upon which to build prestige. Meanwhile, at working-class institutions (most public universities and all community colleges), low status correlates with insufficient funding and facilities.

and students from these schools—experience significant marginalization.

In American public discourse, going to college means moving away from home, living in a dorm, spending evenings eating pizza with friends and studying. In reality, many college students, especially at working-class institutions, commute to campus and struggle to balance a job and homework, let alone find time for pizza. Media reports tell us that the college admissions process is putting increasing pressure on high school students, few of whom gain entrance to their preferred school. Yet more than 25 percent of four-year institutions accept 75 to 90 percent of applicants, and 17 percent of schools have no admissions criteria at all (*Almanac of Higher Education*). While selectivity is one criterion for elite status, working-class institutions pride themselves on another goal:

providing access to students for whom college might otherwise be impossible.

Because they don’t fit the image of college, working-class institutions are widely seen as second-rate schools that students attend because they have to, not because they want to. Students joke that YSU can also mean “You Screwed Up.” That image sticks, even though the university has many strong programs and its faculty and students have won prestigious national awards, grants, and recognition.

These status differences are part of a self-perpetuating system for both faculty and students. For faculty, professional prestige is based largely on where one works and where one is trained. Institutional prestige facilitates access to grants, awards, and jobs, and these in turn contribute to the status of both the individual professor and his or her university. For students, institutional status influences opportunities in the job market and in graduate school admissions.

Real Differences

The class system of higher education creates real differences in resources and working conditions for both faculty and students. Elite schools generally have larger endowments and a stronger pool of potential donors, so they can provide high-quality facilities, well-stocked libraries, up-to-date technology, and other conditions that facilitate teaching and learning. In contrast, publicly funded schools, especially regional campuses and community colleges, almost never have enough money. Their faculty and students frequently work in run-down buildings and lack access to technology, materials, and staff support. On my campus, for example, science faculty regularly see their research disrupted when pieces of the ceiling fall on their labs and desks.

Workloads also differ. At working-class institutions, many faculty teach four or more sections per term, including large classes. They are likely to serve

on many committees, advise dozens of students, and have relatively limited clerical or graduate assistant help. At most elite schools, faculty members teach smaller and fewer classes, and they often have teaching assistants to help with grading and preparing class materials. They may also have lighter committee and advising loads, lots of clerical support, and a couple of days each week to work on research.

Students also work harder at working-class schools, in part because many come from working-class backgrounds. Students at working-class institutions often work thirty-five or more hours per week, commute long distances between home and campus, and have family responsibilities that make completing assignments difficult. A report by the American Council on Education reports that, not surprisingly, students with lower household incomes work more than wealthier students (American Council on Education 2006). These students work hard to get all they can from their education. But the decks are stacked against them.

Differences of resources, working conditions, and status translate into different opportunities. Education is widely seen as the ticket to upward mobility, but the value of the degree rests in part on the class of the institution. A ticket from an elite school admits a graduate to better jobs and graduate programs, while tickets from working-class institutions too often get students only one rung up the class ladder, if that. Thus, while more students than ever are attending college, more people are not moving into the middle class (Scott and Leonhardt 2005).

How We Can Respond

The class system of higher education serves the interests of those who benefit from elite educations, and that makes changing the system difficult. So if we can't change the



George Mason University. (Photo by Evan Cantwell, Creative Services)

system, how should we respond?

First, faculty and graduates of working-class institutions must resist internalizing the idea that our work and education are not good enough. We and our allies should brag about what community colleges and regional state schools offer: dedicated faculty who care about teaching and about their students, programs that help students succeed despite their busy lives and often inadequate preparation, and university communities that value the culture and experiences of working-class students.

Second, we should advocate for state and federal funding formulas that will increase access for lower-income students and reward schools that successfully address their needs. This means rethinking state funding formulas that reward universities based on research-oriented criteria that have little to do with the quality of student learning. It also means advocating for more financial aid so students can work fewer hours or afford to live on campus. And it means paying attention to the student loan crisis. In May 2008, several banks announced that they would no longer lend money to students attending community colleges, reducing access for the more than 6.8 million students who attend these schools (Almanac of Higher

Education). We should fight back.

We can fight best when we fight together. In 2007, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM) developed its own “Plan for UMass,” advocating for more funding and better access to higher education (www.phenomonline.org). By bringing together representatives from the multiple UMass campuses, including faculty, staff, and students, PHENOM made its ideas visible and put pressure on state leaders. PHENOM activists enacted the last words of early twentieth-century labor organizer Joe Hill: “Don’t waste any time mourning. Organize.” 📌

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[CLASS ON CAMPUS]

Race and Class: Taking Action at the Intersections

■ RHONDA SOTO, coordinator of the Race/Class Intersections program at Class Action

Discussing race without including class analysis is like watching a bird fly without looking at the sky: it's possible, but it misses the larger context. Intersections of race and class are complicated and personal, and they need to be acknowledged. Yet in the United States, so little talk about class occurs that great confusion surrounds these intersections. As the coordinator of the Race/Class Intersections program at the nonprofit Class Action (www.classism.org), I have

heard from many people who say our conversation is the first time they have publicly discussed the intersection of race and class. They search for the right words to express the complicated relationship between these categories, and find that it defies existing frameworks.

Much of Class Action's work takes place at institutions of higher education. We work with professional and administrative staff, students, and community members to identify and dismantle

class barriers and biases, and to build opportunities for cross-class alliances. Class remains largely invisible on college campuses, as most institutions do not include class in their campus dialogues, diversity training, or curricular offerings. The lack of discussion about class has led to confusion about the race/class intersection, with race sometimes becoming a stand-in for class. This is problematic not only for the many first-generation college students who are people of color, but also for students whose race- and class-based identities do not intersect in stereotypical ways.

Complicated Junctures

When race becomes a stand-in for class, it creates conflict for students of color who are presumed to be from low-income families and for white students who are presumed not to be. We hear the terms "working-class whites" and "middle-class blacks," but not the terms "middle-class whites" or "working-class blacks." But it is unnecessary to name what is normative. Thus our discussions about "the working class" and "people of color" make working-class white students and middle-class students of color invisible, which can be devastating to these students. At the same time, our language suggests indifference to working-class people of color, who are accepted as the norm. In order to serve the full range of students on our campuses, we must deal with issues of racism *and* issues of classism, and we must understand how they intersect.

Research confirms ever-widening disparities in educational achievement and enrollment among Latinas/os, African Americans, and low-income students, as compared to their white middle- and upper-class peers (Kelly 2005). Because school resources are tied to local revenues, students from low-income communities, who are disproportionately people of color, are more likely to have inexperienced teachers, limited resources, and little access to role models or men-

Steps to Support Low-Income Students across Identities

Campuses should take steps to create more supportive cultures for lower-income students from diverse cultural backgrounds. These include:

Review and Revise the Curricula

Challenge curricula and academic cultures that privilege certain people and marginalize others. As women's studies and ethnic studies have done, encourage diverse voices, leadership styles, and methods of teaching, learning, and evaluating that build on the strengths of poor and working-class students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Give students opportunities to learn about their own identities, histories, and cultures. Recognize working-class studies, like women's studies and ethnic studies, as a legitimate and necessary field of intellectual inquiry.

Provide Necessary Support Services

Welcome students to campus early. Invite families to learn about the school and the college experience. Give access to academic support for students who have had less rigorous preparation.

Provide programs specifically for first-generation college students, including facilitated support groups, orientation programs that help students understand the hidden rules of the academy, and faculty/staff mentors. Provide role models with similar backgrounds, including first-generation faculty and staff, who can help alleviate the culture shock and isolation many first-generation students experience.

Reduce the Barriers

Like other forms of oppression, classism operates on multiple levels, from individual attitudes to institutional practices and cultural norms. Give faculty, staff, and students opportunities to learn about classism through training and workshops. As individuals' consciousness about classism and racism increase, they become able to change their behaviors. As a result, campus communities become more welcoming places. A systemic review of campus policies and practices may also help expose unintended classism.

—Rhonda Soto

tors (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2008). They enter college without adequate preparation for success, and their transition to higher education is often difficult. Moreover, families with limited income may not be able to spare their hard-working college-age children, who could contribute financially rather than plunge the family into debt with education loans.

The challenges related to resources are often compounded by the psychological pressures low-income students, particularly low-income students of color, face. College definitely has a “class culture,” and it isn’t the culture of working-class or lower-income students. Research tells us that college is a middle-class experience and that many low-income students feel pressured to assimilate (DiMaria 2006). Race and ethnicity may deepen these students’ feelings of isolation, especially if they come from families whose culture and language differs from that of majority students. Perception and judgments of faculty and peers have an impact as well. Because affirmative action is a hot-button issue, students of color may find themselves prejudged by their peers and professors, even as the numbers of (typically white) legacy admissions exceed the number of affirmative action admissions.

The presence or absence of cultural, social, and academic capital can also have a profound impact on students. Pierre Bourdieu describes cultural capital, or what you know, as the forms of knowledge, skill, education, and other advantages a person has that confer higher status (1986). Knowing the rules of etiquette (such as which fork to use) or understanding references to theater are examples of cultural capital. Social capital, or who you know, refers to resources based on group membership, relationships, or networks of influence and support (Bourdieu 1986). To these Will Barratt adds the concept of academic capital, which students begin to attain in the home (2007). Second-generation students come to




At an Exploring Class workshop at Dartmouth College, students participate in an activity that visually represents disparities of wealth distribution in the United States. (Photo courtesy of Class Action)

college with accumulated academic capital, which they apply to gain more through excellent grades, honors and awards, and participation in academic clubs. Students of color and lower-income students may have significant cultural or social capital within their own communities, but the dominant academic culture might not recognize or appreciate these forms of capital.

Supporting Students

If educational institutions are to embrace all of their students and staff, they must address the impact of race and class on the experiences and successes of students. Acknowledging the existence of class on campus is an important first step. Some elite colleges, recognizing that few students from lower-income families are attending their schools, have recently increased financial aid to recruit high-achieving students from low-income families. But getting poor and working-class students through the door is only the beginning. Institutions need to take additional steps (including revising the curricula, providing support services, and reducing cultural barriers, as detailed in the sidebar) to provide adequate support so students can succeed and thrive.

For more theory and research on these topics, see “Class in Education,” a recently published special issue of the journal *Equity and Education* guest edited by Felice Yeskel, Class Action’s executive director. Class Action also provides a range of resources to assist campuses on our Web site: www.classism.org. 

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[PERSPECTIVES]

Class, at Vanderbilt? Breaking the Silence at an Elite Institution

■ KATHERINE FUSCO, lecturer in the English department at Vanderbilt University

When I started teaching at Vanderbilt University, I noticed students who did not fit the mold of the privileged upper-class young adult my colleagues had told me to expect. These students had work-study jobs, athletic scholarships, and talent scholarships at the music school. Several told me they were struggling to fit in academically and socially for reasons ranging from

university like Vanderbilt? Although Vanderbilt actively pursues a diverse student body, many of our students come from wealthy backgrounds. Not surprisingly, these students find class differences easier to ignore than to address.

In my classroom, wealthier students in particular struggled with the idea that extreme wealth depends upon the exploitation of others. Occasionally these

What, I wondered, would it mean to teach about class, and specifically about the working class, at an elite university like Vanderbilt?

unfamiliarity with professors' cultural references to lack of access to the status markers valued by their peers.

As I watched these young adults struggle, I grew concerned about whether all students were getting a fair shot at college. With the help of Vanderbilt's Writing Studio and Center for Teaching, I began researching how socioeconomic status affects college students. I found that working-class students deal with a range of issues that affect their academic success, including lower confidence in their writing, preferences for certain styles of instruction, and psychological pressures to "pass" as middle class.

Inspired by what I learned, I decided to focus my entry-level composition class on the topic of working-class studies. When I shared my plans with colleagues, they frequently responded with laughter: "Class, at Vanderbilt?" To be fair, I shared some of the concerns implicit in their derision. What, I wondered, would it mean to teach about class, and specifically about the working class, at an elite

students would claim that working-class authors who had experienced upward mobility needed to "get over" their class history and move on. They would even complain that authors like bell hooks were stereotyping the rich. Although I found comments like these ridiculous, I also felt that I needed to allow them into the conversation to prevent shutting down communication. Middle-class students, too, sometimes found that class was a touchy subject as they realized the precariousness of their class positions and recognized their own participation in structures of inequality.

Even as I tried to combat this resistance, I was aware of the psychological toll our discussions took on my working-class students. These students frequently seemed frustrated with their classmates' obliviousness, but they also seemed uncomfortable speaking up. One student talked with me privately about what she described as the carelessness of the wealthy. She mentioned that most of her classmates left their laptops lying around, but that she thought of hers as



Katherine Fusco

her "gold." For working-class students like her, Vanderbilt is a golden opportunity made possible through scholarships funded by the university's generous endowments. Yet even with this opportunity, many students struggle to gain access to the world their more affluent classmates occupy so comfortably.

Working-class students are as much a part of the Vanderbilt community as their more wealthy peers, but you wouldn't know it from the reaction "Class, at Vanderbilt?" Implicit in this statement is both a willful blindness to the presence of students who do not fit the Vanderbilt profile and an erasure of their presence on campus. This silence in the face of class inequality communicates to students that if they have made it to an elite institution like Vanderbilt, they need not be concerned about class. Even more damagingly, it suggests to all students that only poor or working-class students need to think about socioeconomic inequity. But class inequality is a problem in which all are implicated—university students and professors included.

In response to these acts of erasure, I maintain that class must be part of the curriculum, *especially* at elite universities. I hope that my colleagues at all universities will learn to see teaching on class as a necessity, not an anomaly. 📍

[PERSPECTIVES]

Engaging with Contradiction by Engaging with Community

■ **DAVID SEITZ**, junior majoring in political science and minoring in women's, gender, and sexuality studies at Macalester College

It's the first seriously snowy day of winter in the Twin Cities. (Believe it or not, it doesn't snow continuously in Minnesota.) Up bright and early this Saturday morning, a gaggle of students hops into a van and crosses the river, from St. Paul to Minneapolis. We're going to learn about the role of the arts in social change.

The students are part of Macalester College's Lives of Commitment program, a joint project of the Civic

fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development." (As some say in Minnesota, *oh dear!*) "But if you teach me to organize, then whatever the challenge, I can join together with my peers, and we will fashion our own solution." The students chuckle, and Ricardo pauses to turn up the heat in the chilly storeroom. He explains why he appreciates the piece. "It takes that twist to show that the original conclusion—'if you teach me

[C]ivic engagement projects should strive for mutual accountability and transformation rather than for "top-down" service from college to community.

Engagement Center and the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life. Lives of Commitment brings together thirty first-year students for weekly volunteering in partnership with immigrant and refugee tutoring organizations. The program complements—and complicates—this partnership with reflection groups, retreats, and day trips like this one, all organized around questions of vocation and ethics. Our destination this morning is the Northland Poster Collective, a center created for and by artist-activists. For nearly thirty years, the Collective has produced joyful, intelligent artwork to spread the community's messages about social justice.

At Northland, artist Ricardo Levins Morales shares a favorite poster with us. The poster's text begins simply: "If you give me a fish, you have fed me for a day." Then the writing takes a curious turn. "If you teach me to fish, you have

to fish, you feed me for a lifetime'—was patronizing as hell," he says. The room is silent for a moment. Then students nod, several in strenuous agreement.

This is precisely the kind of realization that the Lives of Commitment program fosters: that civic engagement projects should strive for mutual accountability and transformation rather than for "top-down" service from college to community. Macalester students come from widely divergent backgrounds and often have very different approaches to civic work. But whatever our backgrounds, we students have a lot of privilege to account for as we build community partnerships. Lives of Commitment creates a space for us to wrestle with the tensions between privilege and marginalization, similarity and difference.

In the program, students find structured opportunities to reflect on



David Seitz (Photo by Aaron Brown)

their own socioeconomic backgrounds and closely connected identities such as race and nationality. Integral to this process are the strong relationships the program fosters among students and between students and partner communities. As a privileged person, I'm often more comfortable engaging economic injustice and racism only in my "head space," simultaneously divorcing it from the life I lead. Because Lives of Commitment connects students more deeply with community partners—and with one another—our discussions happen in "heart space" as well. We learn to approach community partnerships with an eye toward mutual exchange and with openness to reformulating our own personal and political commitments.

Ricardo's admonition about being "patronizing," and its implicit invitation to think honestly about where I'm coming from, linger in my mind as I continue my civic engagement work beyond the program. My classmates and I know there isn't one perfect way to be or act. But thanks to our sustained engagement with one another and with the community, we can keep asking questions and taking risks. By engaging personally with activists, community members, and other students, I have come to understand that living a "life of commitment" requires my commitment to the lives and voices of others. □

[CAMPUS PRACTICE]

Finding Context: Teaching About Class through Local History

■ **EHREN HELMUT PFLUGFELDER**, doctoral student in rhetoric and composition in the English department at Purdue University

A few semesters ago, I proposed and taught a working-class studies course at a Midwestern research university (not my current school) whose students, in general, did not come from the working classes. Most students majored in math, medicine, law, or the hard sciences, with only 10 percent working toward a humanities degree. I knew from past courses—where students had openly challenged the values of inclusiveness and diversity—that some students might not care about socioeconomic diversity, nor value the cultural studies approach to

Goals and Frameworks

My main goal, aside from teaching students strategies for historical and cultural research, was to broaden students' worldviews and encourage them to value other perspectives. To do this, I took a cue from Sherry Lee Linkon's *Teaching Working Class* and brought my students into the immediate contexts of working-class culture (1999).

Luckily, the university was located in Cleveland, where waves of immigration and a strong manufacturing base have created a sprawling city with a

By connecting the class to the community, instructors can help students make sense of the material and engage with their surroundings.

economics. I realized I was up for a challenge that would require me to choose my pedagogical approach carefully.

But despite these challenges—or rather, because of them—I wanted to show students that they could broaden their perspectives by seeing the world through a class-based lens. I also wanted to develop a framework that other instructors could use in their courses: one that encourages dynamic interaction with social class through local history. Any instructor, regardless of background, can incorporate a school's geographic and historic environment into the curriculum. By connecting the class to the community, instructors can help students make sense of the material and engage with their surroundings.

complex economic history. Cleveland is currently struggling to avoid the extreme economic troubles affecting other “rust-belt” cities as it shifts from a manufacturing-based economy to technology-driven one. Given this context, I knew that the area had more than enough working-class history to fulfill the course needs. History professors and local historical institutions like the Western Reserve Historical Society helped me to identify relevant information as I prepared to teach the course.

Although finding information was not a problem, I faced another challenge that I hoped to turn into an asset. I had lived in the area for less than three years, so I could hardly present myself to students as an expert on Cleveland neighborhoods and social history. I

decided to reveal my background to students on the first day, framing the course as an opportunity for joint inquiry. This strategy allowed me to “de-center” the classroom, giving students room to be “experts” about certain issues and events. As a result, students took ownership of their knowledge.

The focus on students' immediate environment not only offered students a tangible grasp on working-class studies, but allowed the city to dynamically reinforce classroom discussion. As students discussed their jobs and interactions in the world beyond the classroom, they connected their lives with our analysis and saw class-based issues arise in their own lives. The city became a pedagogical tool that was constantly available, whenever students walked to class, took the bus to the store, watched the news, or went “out on the town.”

Course Methods

As students analyzed the cultural and economic implications of different local histories, they came to recognize how distant events affect the current culture. Students learned that socioeconomic diversity involves more than census numbers. They saw how change is interrelated: a shift in a city's budget, for instance, has multiple consequences for bus routes, employment, and police presence. They also came to see more subtle relationships, such as how their school's architecture was influenced by civil unrest. The following are some key strategies that led students toward these realizations:

Field (Trips) Work. We spent several classes at the Western Reserve Historical Society, a museum dedicated to showcasing Cleveland history. The staff and professors from the university led us through the exhibits and introduced us to the library holdings, which provided material for students' research projects. Other local trips included a visit to Little Italy, where we

spoke with local business owners and saw evidence of how the neighborhood grew to accommodate new immigrants of various socioeconomic classes.

Understanding Disasters. We examined how the local community responded to man-made catastrophes, such as a significant riot, a massive explosion, and a century-old murder case. Instead of focusing on the gory details, we tried to understand the reasons for the catastrophes, see who they affected, and critique the aftermath. Students were eager to recognize the present-day ramifications of these events.

Peer Poll Assignments. I required students to complete weekly surveys of five to ten peers previously unknown to them, of whom they asked a question related to the week's activities. Some questions focused on general diversity issues, while others addressed specific local concerns. As the semester unfolded, the polls helped students gain insight about how socioeconomic culture operated in the city and in the lives of their peers.

Reading Outsider Critics. Course readings allowed students to understand radically different perspectives on topics that initially seemed mundane to them. We read works by visiting hitchhikers, local artists, comic book creators who used content from the city's history, and historians who criticized the very socioeconomic structures students found so comfortable. Confronting these diverse perspectives allowed students to debate ideas they would not have encountered in their day-to-day lives.

Oral Histories. The oral history research project became the centerpiece of the course. Students worked to report and contextualize local historical events by interviewing participants whom they identified through various businesses and organizations. This project challenged students to expand upon skills gained during the peer poll assignments,



Students explored the social class history of various neighborhoods, including the Haymarket area, which was Cleveland's first slum. Image courtesy of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio (www.wrhs.org).

requiring them to organize information around a central topic and write as-yet unreported histories. At the end of the semester, we collected these histories and placed them online to provide a resource for the community and other students.

A Promising Pedagogical Experiment

As my experience shows, with a little preparation, any instructor can use local history to teach about class difference. In retrospect, I was pleased with most of the course's outcomes. Engagement with outside historical organizations added a depth of meaning and a breadth of material that I would have found difficult to develop on my own. Most significantly, I learned that in order to encourage students to engage in the community, I had to get involved with the community myself. Such engagement can bring both students and teachers much closer to understanding the economic realities of the world in which they teach and learn. 📍

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Peer Poll Assignment Questions

Each week, students polled five to ten peers to learn more about their diverse attitudes and experiences related to socioeconomic class. Questions for this assignment included:

1. What is your work history?
2. Do you think you are part of the working class? Why/why not?
3. What do working-class people earn?
4. What are three things associated with the working class?
5. What is the difference between high culture and low culture?
6. To what subcultures do you belong?
7. Do you live in a working-class city? Explain.
8. Can you name three "class markers"?
9. Can you name three examples of "everyday discrimination"?
10. What is the biggest challenge facing your city right now?

[CAMPUS PRACTICE]

Understanding Socioeconomic Difference: Studies in Poverty and Human Capability

■ **HARLAN BECKLEY**, director of the Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty and Human Capability at Washington and Lee University

Although the United Nations Development Programme consistently ranks the United States among the most impoverished of all developed countries, U.S. undergraduate institutions offer little opportunity for a sustained study of poverty informed by first-hand engagement (United Nations 2008). At many elite schools, students have limited opportunity to encounter poverty in person, and socioeconomically disadvantaged people are grossly underrepresented in undergraduate enrollments. Many institutions have rightly invested in enrolling more economically disadvantaged students. Few, however, have fully incorporated the study of poverty or interaction with impover-

ished communities into their educational programming. Prompted by these gaps and by the lack of socioeconomic diversity at our own institution, in 1997, a group of faculty, students, and administrators at Washington and Lee University initiated a new program for the interdisciplinary study of poverty and human capability.

Program Scope and Structure

The Shepherd Program—named for an alumnus benefactor who has also supported efforts to increase racial diversity at Washington and Lee—has grown significantly during its first decade. Beginning with one faculty member and a half-time administrative assistant, the

program now has four and a half full-time staffers who administer its multiple cocurricular components. At least twenty percent of undergraduate students and a handful of law students enroll in coursework linked to the program, and students can choose from more than thirty discipline-based courses sponsored by eleven departments. The scope of the program's cocurricular activities is even larger, with nearly half of the undergraduate student body participating.

Students typically begin the program with an interdisciplinary course on poverty and human capability, which 15 to 20 percent of students complete at some point prior to their senior year. These students are eligible to apply for an eight-week summer domestic or international internship, in which thirty or more undergraduates (primarily rising juniors and seniors) participate each summer. Most students who complete the internship choose to concentrate (or minor) in poverty studies. These students enroll in four discipline-based courses focused on poverty, as well as a capstone interdisciplinary seminar. The capstone course culminates with a research paper emerging from cocurricular experiences and linked to the major field of study. This thesis project helps prepare students for future civic involvement.

The summer internship is structured as a non-credit-bearing course for which all students receive expense reimbursement and students on financial aid receive \$1,300 stipends. Interns work in a range of settings (from rural Arkansas to urban New York) in positions relevant to their long-term professional interests. A student planning a career in health care might intern at a public health facility in Helena, Arkansas, or at the addiction clinic at Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital. These internships expose students to many forms of diversity as they work with people from vastly different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds and along-

Examples of Shepherd Program Study

Students completing the Shepherd program concentration enroll in at least two interdisciplinary courses, four discipline-based courses, and a summer internship over the course of their undergraduate education. They almost always combine these required components of the program with other cocurricular activities. Recent participants included:

- Logan Gibson, a 2008 graduate who taught in Swaziland for her summer internship and returned to Africa the following summer to set up a library in Rwanda. Logan's capstone thesis was on the education of girls and women in South Africa.
- Alice Shih, a 2008 graduate who interned as an advocate with Housing Works, a community-based organization in Washington, D.C., dedicated to fighting the twin crises of HIV/AIDS and homelessness. Alice's capstone thesis on the cognitive, developmental, and social effects of hunger and malnutrition among children in the United States emerged out of her work with the Campus Kitchen.

Both Alice and Logan are now postgraduate interns for the National Community Action Foundation, where they work on antipoverty policy. Logan plans to gain more experience in policy and development in the D.C. area, while Alice has accepted a one-year legal research position at Yale University. Alice and Logan intend to pursue careers focusing on policy and development to combat domestic and international poverty.

side interns from Berea, Morehouse, Spelman, and Middlebury colleges.

Most Shepherd Program students supplement their course work with additional cocurricular options. Entering first-year students may participate in a preorientation service trip led by upper-level students who have completed the introductory course. Alumni chapters in major metropolitan areas organize and host “alternative break” service-learning projects in February and April. Other cocurricular options include community-based research and work with the Campus Kitchen chapter (www.campuskitchens.org). Even after graduating, students can continue their Shepherd Program education through fellowships that support work with agencies serving disadvantaged persons.

Program Outcomes

The Shepherd Program accomplishes two primary goals. First, it informs a broad cross-section of students about issues pertaining to poverty. Second, it facilitates a deeper understanding of poverty, both international and domestic, to enrich the academic majors of 5 to 7 percent of each graduating class. We intend for the sustained study of poverty to shape and even transform the professional and civic lives of graduates, whether they become businesspersons, educators, lawyers, healthcare workers, policymakers, community organizers, or entrepreneurs.

Accomplishing the Shepherd Program’s goals requires a sustained and integrated curricular and cocurricular approach. Shepherd Program graduates attest that the most profound impact of their education occurs as they encounter people different from themselves and become passionate about staying in touch with their new friends. But service learning is effective only when integrated into a new cognitive understanding. Students are often astonished to learn that more than twelve million children in the United States live in “food insecure”



Shepherd Program students engage in several cocurricular options, including Washington and Lee’s Campus Kitchen chapter. Through Campus Kitchen, students prepare meals from food that would otherwise be discarded. They deliver these meals to community agencies, where they eat with community members while promoting nutrition education. (Photo by Patrick Hinely for Washington and Lee University)

households, where inadequate nutrition can influence cognitive development (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2007). Discoveries like this motivate and inform their cocurricular work.


Although tailored to Washington and Lee’s special circumstances and mission, the principal purposes and core components of the Shepherd Program are adaptable to most institutions. Through this sustained and integrated approach, students can come to better understand the challenges poverty presents in the United States and in the developing world.

Growing Initiatives

We are now collaborating with David Bradley, executive director of the National Community Action Foundation, to expand the Shepherd program and help remedy the conspicuous absence of sustained poverty studies in higher education. David has been working without remuneration to secure partial funding for an eleven-school consortium via congressional authorization for a demonstration project in higher education. Assuming congressional action, the consortium will allow ten more schools to incorporate the study of poverty and human capability in their undergraduate and legal education programming. In

the meantime, several foundations have provided funding for smaller similar programs at four additional institutions.

These programs will not automatically augment socioeconomic diversity on our campuses. But they will afford students from all socioeconomic backgrounds an opportunity to work with others across educational, social, and economic strata in order to diminish poverty. They thus remove the barriers that separate our students from disadvantaged people both on and off our campuses while simultaneously making our institutions more inviting for economically disadvantaged students. Combined with financial aid programs and admissions policies that expand opportunities for all, initiatives like the Shepherd program can help increase socioeconomic diversity on campuses by engaging with the community beyond their boundaries.

For more information, including descriptions of related courses, visit shepherdapps.wlu.edu. 

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[RESEARCH REPORT]

Recent Research on Socioeconomic Status and Higher Education

Socioeconomic status has very real effects on student access and success in higher education. Several recent reports have underscored the challenges facing low-income and working-class students, providing useful data for advocates of class-attentive policies and practices.

Demography is Not Destiny: Increasing the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students at Large Public Universities

Authors Jennifer Engle and Colleen O'Brien examined fourteen public institutions that serve high numbers of low-income students to determine what practices best support student retention. Their report provides several recommendations for institutions, states, and the federal government to improve graduation rates for low-income students. Engle and O'Brien identify common features of institutions with higher graduation rates (including high levels of student involvement and special programs for at-risk students), as well as barriers to taking advantage of support programs (such as cost and stu-

dents' limited awareness of opportunities). They dispute the idea that "excellence" and "access" are mutually exclusive and encourage institutions to recommit themselves to serving the public. To download the report, visit www.pellinstitute.org/files/files-demography_is_not_destiny.pdf

Missing in Application: The Texas Top 10 Percent Law and Campus Socioeconomic Diversity

In a paper presented at the March 2008 meeting of the American Educational Research Association, authors Dawn Koffman and Marta Tienda examine the effects of Texas's "Top 10 Percent Law," passed in response to bans on affirmative action and in effect since 1998. The law has aimed to increase diversity at Texas's public colleges by guaranteeing admission to the top ten percent of graduating seniors from each high school, thus opening the gates to students at low-income-serving high schools. Examining application rates at the state's flagship institutions, Koffman and Tienda find that despite the admissions guarantee,

students from low-resource high schools remain significantly less likely to apply than their more affluent peers. The authors stress the need to encourage low-income students, who frequently lack support or information about the application process, to apply to college. Their paper is available at www.texas10.princeton.edu/reports/wp/ApplicantSocialClass.pdf.

Does Diversity Matter in the Education Process?

In this March 2008 occasional paper for the University of California-Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education, author Steve Chatman takes up the Supreme Court's implied challenge in *Grutter v. Bollinger* to more clearly substantiate a "compelling interest" in the educational benefits of diversity. Using a survey of students in the University of California system, Chatman illustrates that at the University of California (one of the most diverse higher education systems in the country), over 40 percent of students report developing greater understanding

Suggestions for Additional Reading about Socioeconomic Class

■ Susan E. Borrego, vice president for planning and enrollment management at California State University-Dominguez Hills

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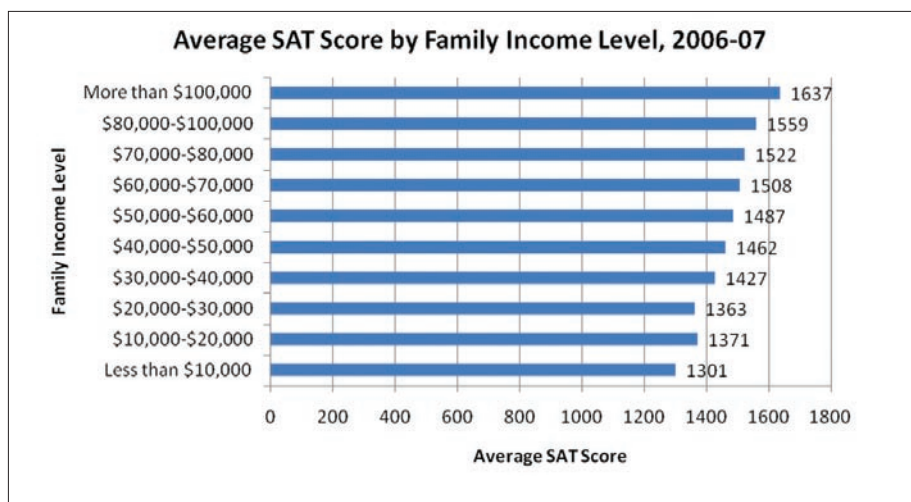
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of others through interactions with those unlike themselves. Analysis by socioeconomic status shows that poor and wealthy students are more likely than middle-class students to report interactions with those outside of their socioeconomic class, and low-income students are least likely of all socioeconomic groups to report feeling a sense of belonging. To read the complete paper, including data on race, gender, religion, and political beliefs, visit cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/docs/ROPS.Chatman.Exploring.3.5.08.pdf.

Family Income and Higher Education Opportunity 1970 to 2006

Postsecondary Education Opportunity's June 2008 issue examines educational opportunity by socioeconomic income quartile and finds that students in the upper income quartile earn more than 50 percent of bachelor's degrees awarded by age twenty-four. In fact, students in the upper quartile have a 72 percent chance of earning a bachelor's degree by age twenty-four, compared with only a 10 percent chance for students in the lowest quartile. The newsletter breaks down attainment rates by quartile from high school graduation through bachelor's attainment, challenging the federal census bureau's decision to discontinue the prac-



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. 2008. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007*, Table 136. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_136.asp?referrer=list (accessed July 24, 2008).

tice of reporting enrollment by income level. To access the full newsletter and monthly archives (available by subscription only), visit www.postsecondary.org.

Window of Opportunity: Targeting Federal Grant Aid to Students with the Lowest Incomes

In February 2008, the Institute for Higher Education Policy released a report on the effectiveness of federal Pell Grants, typically awarded to students with annual family incomes of \$40,000 or less. Finding that Pell Grant aid has not kept pace with rising college costs, the

report recommends policy changes to make college affordable to students in lower income brackets. These changes include raising the maximum award amount, better targeting students in the lowest income brackets, and allowing a negative expected family contribution. Although recommendations may have less application for on-campus practitioners, data about student award allocation are useful for anyone concerned with the financial challenges facing students. To download the report, visit www.ihp.org/assets/files/publications/s-z/Window_of_Opportunity.pdf

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In Print

Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education, Peter Sacks (University of California Press, 2007, \$24.95 hardcover)

Peter Sacks cuts to the core of educational inequity with his analysis of how socio-economic status is the key to opportunity in American education. Buttressing persuasive personal narrative with compelling data, Sacks brings into relief the confluence of interrelated factors (including cultural capital, family pressures, and economic affordability) that escort privileged children onto the college track while essentially shutting the doors on the working class. The scene Sacks describes is devastating but not intractable. Sacks calls readers to reform American education to bring the myth of class mobility closer to reality, beginning (as he does with this book) by breaking the silence surrounding the socioeconomic divide.

Realizing Bakke's Legacy: Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Access in Higher Education, Patricia Marin and Catherine L. Horn, Eds. (Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2008, \$27.50 paperback)

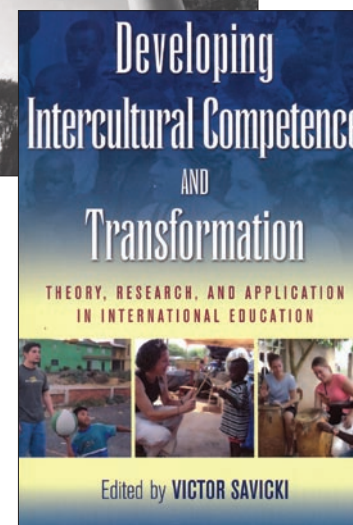
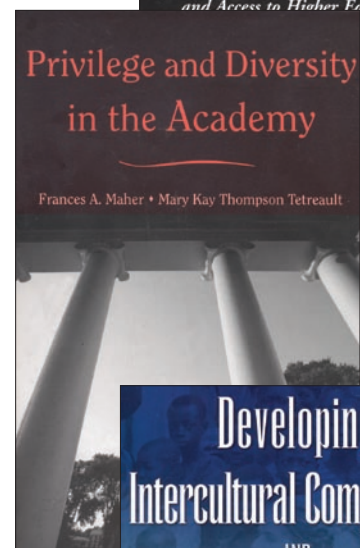
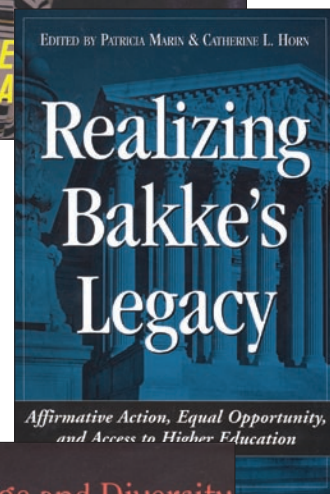
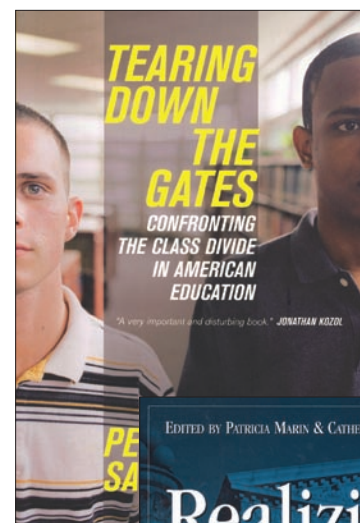
Thirty years after Justice Lewis Powell established the idea that diversity has significant educational benefits in his opinion for *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, editors Marin and Horn examine *Bakke's* enduring legacy. The result is a collection of essays probing *Bakke's* legal, social, and educational effects and examining the viability of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's 2003 suggestion that affirmative action will be unnecessary by 2028. Responding to recent court cases that have challenged the *Bakke* ruling, the editors suggest multiple means of defense against attacks on progressive educational policies. Their volume, with its breadth of focus and specificity of detail, represents one such tool.

Privilege and Diversity in the Academy, Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007, \$36.95 paperback)

In this in-depth study of three major universities (Stanford University, the University of Michigan, and Rutgers University-Newark), authors Maher and Thompson explore how the terms "excellence" and "diversity" have become, to varying degrees, interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. Through historical and comparative analysis, Maher and Thompson illustrate that cultural shifts are not only possible but necessary if institutions are to become truly outstanding. Their research explores how privilege operates at a systemic level, affecting an institution's ability to advance diverse scholarship across disciplines. The resulting volume attests to the need to craft programs and policies that are sensitive to local contexts when trying to create more inclusive institutions.

Developing Intercultural Competence and Transformation: Theory, Research, and Application in International Education, Victor Savicki, Ed. (Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2008, \$29.95 paperback)

American anxieties about globalization have drawn increased attention to study abroad as a way to prepare students for leadership in the modern world. But as Victor Savicki points out, educators cannot simply send students overseas for a semester or less and expect them to return interculturally fluent. Savicki and contributors urge educators to craft intentional opportunities for learning based in experiential and reflective practices. Combining educational theory, program assessment, and pedagogical design, their essays serve as a guide for educators hoping to lead students toward transformation through intercultural exchange.



Resources

Civic Engagement at the Center

AAC&U's recently published monograph, *Civic Engagement at the Center: Building Democracy through Integrated Cocurricular and Curricular Experiences*, shares best practices in sustained community engagement from the Bonner Scholars and Bonner Leaders scholarship programs. Authors Ariane Hoy and Wayne Meisel describe compelling outcomes at seventy-seven participating campuses, each of which strives to educate students for active citizenship in a complex and interconnected world. To order the monograph, visit www.aacu.org.

What's Race Got to Do with It?

In this California Newsreel film, producer and director Jean Cheng chronicles one class's semester of difficult conversations at the University of California-Berkeley, where students struggle to confront the race and class divisions that persist on their elite campus. The result is an informative look at one group's attempt to embrace diversity across difference, exploring questions of privilege, justice, and social responsibility. Cheng's video illustrates classroom techniques and follows students as they struggle toward a paradigm shift. To order the DVD, visit www.whatsrace.org.

Opportunity Matters

The Pell Institute issued the inaugural issue of its new annual journal, *Opportunity Matters: A Journal of Research Informing Educational Opportunity Practice and Programs*, in June 2008. The journal publishes qualitative and quantitative research geared toward improving educational opportunity for underserved students, including low-income and first-generation students, underrepresented students of color, and students with disabilities. To subscribe or view the call for papers, visit www.pellinstitute.org/journal.html.

Opportunities

Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence

AAC&U's Network for Academic Renewal will hold its biennial diversity education meeting on October 16-18, 2008, in Long Beach, California. The conference aims to help campuses take diversity efforts to the next level of comprehensive action by highlighting curricular, cocurricular, and institutional models that foster diverse and inclusive environments. For details, visit www.aacu.org/meetings/diversityandlearning.

NAME 2008 Conference

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) will hold its 18th annual international conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 12-16, 2008. Titled "Beyond Celebrating Diversity: ReACTivating the Equity and Social Justice Roots of Multicultural Education," the conference will encourage participants to return to diversity education's roots in social justice. For information, visit www.nameorg.org.

AAC&U Annual Meeting 2009

AAC&U will hold its Annual Meeting, "Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America's Promise," on January 21-24, 2009, in Seattle, Washington. With a focus on liberal education as critical to preparing students for today's global challenges, the Annual Meeting will provide opportunities to examine the relationship between college learning and society. Featured speakers will include Peter Sacks, author of *Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education*. For more information, visit www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting.

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Upcoming AAC&U Meetings

MEETING	LOCATION	DATES
Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence	<i>Long Beach, California</i>	OCTOBER 16-18, 2008
Engaging Science, Advancing Learning	<i>Providence, Rhode Island</i>	NOVEMBER 6-8, 2008
Annual Meeting 2009	<i>Seattle, Washington</i>	JANUARY 21-24, 2009
General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need	<i>Baltimore, Maryland</i>	FEBRUARY 26-28, 2009

AAC&U Associates

Enrollment in the Associate program provides an opportunity for individuals on AAC&U member campuses to advance core purposes and best practices in undergraduate education and to strengthen their collaboration with AAC&U's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Global Initiatives. Associates pay \$60 per calendar year and receive the same benefits as AAC&U Campus Representatives, including subscriptions to our print publications, *Liberal Education*, *Peer Review*, and *Diversity & Democracy*, electronic copies of *On Campus with Women*, invitations to apply for grant-funded projects, and advance notice of calls for proposals for institutes and meetings. For more information, please visit www.aacu.org or call Renee Gamache at 202-884-0809.

About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,150 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size. AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

From AAC&U Board Statement on Liberal Learning

AAC&U believes that by its nature... liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.



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